

**COMPONENTS RELATED TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF A SUCCESSFUL
MEDIA RELATIONS PROGRAM FOR THE FIRE SERVICE**

EXECUTIVE DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

Media relations can be important to the public image of the local Fire Department. This along with the public's need for accurate information and the media's need for interesting stories presents a challenging situation. Meeting these three separate goals can be accomplished through a comprehensive media program designed to enhance the relationship of the fire department with the media while protecting it from misquotes, misrepresentations and legal liabilities. Preserving individual privacy rights and providing for the safety of the media on the emergency scene are also critical factors in developing a sound program.

The primary problem addressed is that the Elgin Fire Department does not have a comprehensive media program with written policies.

The purpose of this research was to gather pertinent information and material to be used in the development of a media relations program for the Elgin Fire Department. The action research method was used.

The research questions addressed were:

1. What components are needed for the development of a successful and comprehensive media relations program?
2. What existing written policies or guidelines are available to be used as "models" for the development of a media program?
3. Of the identified components for a successful media program, which ones are applicable to the Elgin Fire Department?

The research procedure employed used literature reviews and personal interview. Through these sources "model" written policies and media education programs were found. Numerous articles

dealt with communication skills with the media. Legal sources were also used to research the issues of Freedom of Information, Privacy Rights, and Rights to Information.

The results showed that a comprehensive media relations program includes the components of media education, communication skills and written policies. Media education is defined as educating the media in fire department operations. Communications skills involves training fire department personnel in how to talk to the media. Written policies provide the consistent guidelines needed to communicate accurate and non-legally liable information. Sample programs were found from other fire departments with regard to media education and written policies.

Recommendations for the Elgin Fire Department included the development of written policies and guidelines. These documents would specify the who, what, when and where of our response to media inquiries. The concept of media education was addressed by suggesting an annual breakfast meeting with local media to discuss safety and legal issues as well as giving an orientation to fire department operations. A final recommendation was to have all personnel trained in media communications and the written policies.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
Abstract.....	1
Table of Contents.....	3
Introduction.....	4
Background and Significance.....	5
Literature Review.....	7
Procedures.....	12
Results.....	14
Discussion.....	19
Recommendations.....	22
References.....	24
Appendix A Elgin Fire Department Media Information Policy.....	26
Appendix B Sedgwick County Media Relations Policy.....	28
Appendix C Newport News Fire Department Media Policy.....	31
Appendix D Hollywood Fire and Rescue Press Information Sheet.....	40
Appendix E Prince William County Public Information Policy.....	42
Appendix F Phoenix Fire Department Public Information Policy.....	45
Appendix G Prince William County Press Release Worksheet.....	49
Appendix H Emergency Incident Media Worksheet.....	51
Appendix I Phoenix Fire Department Media Guide.....	54

INTRODUCTION

In order to enhance its positive public image the Fire Service needs to develop a good working relationship with the local media. A mutually beneficial partnership with the press, television and radio can be a “win-win-win” situation. The media gets timely and accurate material, the public gets interesting and informative news and the Fire Service reinforces its image as an efficient customer service oriented government agency.

Creating this partnership however can be difficult if there are no guidelines and boundaries. Freedom of the Press has to be balanced with a respect for an individual's privacy rights. Information can only be safely given if it is both legally and ethically within limits. For example, the names of juvenile firesetters if given to the media can violate some Statutes and will undoubtedly cause needless embarrassment and pain to the offender and his family. This dilemma has been successfully addressed by other Fire Departments like Phoenix and Hollywood Florida to name a few. In these departments specific written procedures and policies have been developed and implemented. They have found a balance between media information and privacy rights.

This paper addresses the problem: The Elgin Illinois Fire Department does not presently have a comprehensive written policy or guidelines related to information given to the media.

Due to this fact, there is often confusion as to who speaks for the department to the media what information can be given. This is especially a concern on routine fire and ambulance calls where no public information officer is officially designated. This problem leads to inconsistency as well as a vulnerability to mistakenly violating someone's rights.

The purpose of this study was to develop a plan for a comprehensive media relations program for the Elgin Fire Department. This study uses action research methodology to address the following research questions:

1. What components are needed for the development a comprehensive media relations program?
2. What written policies and guidelines are available for use as “models” for the development of a media program?
3. Of the identified components for a successful media program which ones are applicable to the Elgin Fire Department?

BACKGROUND and SIGNIFICANCE

The City of Elgin Illinois is a mid-size city approximately 40 miles northwest of Chicago. The resident population is 82,000 and is rapidly growing. The city itself was incorporated in 1854 and the fire department was established in 1867. The population is of mixed race with significant percentages of Black, Hispanic and Laotian minorities.

In 1997, the Elgin Fire Department had 109 career firefighters operating four (4) Advanced Life Support (ALS) ambulances, one (1) ALS Fire Engine, four (4) additional Engine Companies and two (2) Ladder companies. Three shifts rotated on a 24 hr. on and 48 hr. off schedule. The Fire Department responded to a total of 8445 alarms in 1996. Fire alarms accounted for 2418 of these alarms with the remaining 6027 being emergency medical service calls.

The local media that covers the Elgin area includes two daily newspapers, a cable TV news team and two radio stations. Due to its close proximity to Chicago, there are often inquiries from several other newspapers, radio stations and television when major events occur in the city. It is not unusual to have major network coverage for fires involving deaths or major dollar loss.

Overall the Elgin Fire Department enjoys a working relationship with the local media. Most stories are supportive and accurate. However, on occasion there have been inaccuracies, misquotes and misunderstandings. A recent article on a high rise fire (Daily Herald July 16, 1997) recently reported that 100 residents had to be evacuated and the “engine ladder tower was used to extinguish the fire from the exterior.” In reality, this was a “room and contents” fire quickly extinguished using a handline. The sources quoted in this article were Police Officers. No fire department official was contacted or interviewed regarding this fire. This type of situation has occurred previously. At one multi-million dollar fire the press interviewed an uninformed firefighter regarding fireground tactics. This resulted in a less than favorable critique of our department's capabilities. In this firefighter's opinion we should have extinguished this fire with a handline. Unfortunately, he had a different point of view than the Fire Officers on the scene who did not talk with the press. These problems seem to have resulted from an unclear policy on media relations and a misunderstanding of fire department operations by the media.

Information exchange with the media is addressed in a brief written policy by the Elgin Fire Department (Appendix A). This policy states that a written report will be made available to the press “whenever you have an alarm of unusual circumstance or dollar loss.” Traditionally, fire scene information is given to the media by the incident commander or a Deputy Chief. This assignment can be delegated to a Public Information Officer (PIO) in major incidents. Ambulance information can be given

to the media by an officer assigned to the ambulance. This practice however, does not appear in a written policy nor are there specific guidelines addressing what information can be given and what needs to be withheld in order to protect an individual's privacy. An example would be on ambulance calls. What information if any can be given -regarding the patient's illness or injuries? Can we even describe their condition as "serious" or "critical"? On fire incidents can we tell the press that a fire cause was "children playing with matches?" Without guidelines, the responses to these questions can vary between individual officers.

It is anticipated that these problems will repeat themselves unless a clear policy is written that defines who speaks to the media and what can be said. Additionally, educating the media on fire department operations prior to incident can be beneficial to accurate reporting.

This paper was prepared to satisfy the requirements for the Executive Development Class in the Executive Fire Officer Program at the National Fire Academy ("NFA"). This research relates to the units on problem solving, legal aspects and marketing in the public sector. As presented in the problem solving unit a systematic approach was used. The problem was defined, a goal established, the situation analyzed, strategies defined, and an action plan recommended. A definitive action plan, implementing and monitoring the plan, and evaluation will need to occur at a later date.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Several articles on media relations were found in a review of the available literature at the National Emergency Training Center's Learning Resource Center. These articles for the most part can be categorized into the sub-headings of legal aspects regarding media information, interview techniques when dealing with the media and education of the media. There was limited information on written fire department policies regarding media relations.

Legal Aspects

The legal concepts of Freedom of Information, Individual Privacy Rights and Freedom of the Press need to be understood in order to develop a media policy that is fair and respectful of individuals yet informative to the public. A clear understanding of the interplay of these concepts will also reduce the risk of a fire department's liability.

Attorneys Lawrence and Ilona Hogan address these issues in their book, "Legal Aspects of the Fire Service" (1995). Chapter 19 specifically speaks to the public's right to know vs. the need for confidentiality. They are quoted "There is an on-going struggle in our society to balance freedom of speech and press against the need of the government to keep some things confidential" (pg 251). The authors explored this dilemma through related sample case histories. Hogan and Hogan also have a section of their book entitled "When to keep your mouth shut" (pg 262-262) that explores examples of successful and unsuccessful reactions to media inquiries.

These same concepts of Right to Privacy and Freedom of Information are also addressed in chapter 7, Legal Issues, of the Emergency Medical Services Public Information, Education and Relations Manual (EMS PIER) (1994). In this chapter the Freedom of Information Act is thoroughly

explained and exemptions to this law are detailed. Privacy rights are discussed along with the public safety rights of emergency responders to secure hazardous scenes and deny media access. This last concern is discussed in chapter 8, entitled “Taking it to the Streets,” it is stated “You cannot restrict media from covering a story, but you can limit their access to certain areas if the command staff believes it to be dangerous or if it interferes with emergency operations” (pg 56). The PIER Manual is a comprehensive training manual used to educate Public Information Officers working in the area of emergency services.

Communicating with the Media

Several trade magazine articles address the aspect of communication skills when dealing with the media. Blundell and Kuban in their article “Nine types of media questions” (July 1995) give advice on answering common media inquiries. They categorize questions in 9 types, such as “the multiple question” and the “ranking question.” The objective of this article appears to be to protect the Fire Department from embarrassment and misquotes.

A similarly defensive approach is taken by Lt. John Kane in his article “The Care and Feeding of the Media Monster” (July 1996). Lt. Kane warns that “there is no such thing as off the record” and “never say,” “no comment” (pg 43). He also lists 20 news media commandments such as “Say it 30 seconds” and “never wear dark glasses during an interview” (pg. 46). Ironically the second to the last paragraph of the article advises the reader to “finally, relax”. Lt. Kane does make a case for having a media plan prior to any disaster.

Jerry Rosendahl also addresses media communications in his article “Dealing with the Media” (Feb. 1994). In addition to his simple and straight forward advice such as “honesty is the best policy”

and “portray a positive image” (pg. 25), he suggests educating the media about the Fire department. He specifically advises “invite them to the department for a tour of the apparatus, equipment and station” (pg. 25).

Proactive communications as means of providing timely information to the media while not adding to on scene stress at an incident is discussed in articles by Michael Trunko (1995) and Ronny Coleman (1997). Both authors favor the use of press releases as a means of controlling information exchange while not diverting time and energy from the emergency scene. The emergency press release is coupled with the appointment of a Public Information Officer (“PIO”) as designated by the Incident Management System (“IMS”). A case is made for the PIO being a permanent job function on the fire department as opposed to an on scene appointment. A permanently designated PIO would have the benefit of a pre-established rapport with media representatives. This assignment would eliminate the confusion as to who speaks to the media. Establishing a permanent PIO, using press releases and having timely press conferences would provide a steady flow of information without hampering emergency operations.

Media Education

In addition to Rosendahl's suggestion of media education, Bob Riha writes in his article “Media Relations Guidelines for Public Safety Personnel” (July 1996), “The key to successful relations is education and communication” (pg. 21). He suggests forming a media committee made up of local media and fire representatives to develop policies and procedures related to emergency situations. It is his belief that such a joint venture would lead to more effective working relationships and provide for less confused and safer operations at the emergency scene.

Media education has been taken to an even higher level by the Phoenix Fire Department. In his article “Phoenix Certifies Journalists to Report It Right” (May 1997), Tim Simmons outlines the basic objectives and course content of the Phoenix Fire Department program. He stresses that the two main reasons for this training are for media safety and public education regarding the Fire Service. Sarah Stahlbush in a similar article for Phoenix Fire Works (May/July 1997) discusses the media experience at the five day Media Academy completed this last April. She states, “The program was initiated because the public does have a right to information which they are provided by way of the media. The media, however, has a right to get the story safely” (pg 2) A second benefit to this academy is that partnerships are established between the fire department and media. This further insures accurate and fair reporting. Stahlbush writes, “The result is a partnership between two organizations from which everyone benefits” (pg. 3).

Written Policies and Media Worksheets

The literature reviewed offered little in the way of model media policies. Patrick Cote (1994) in the EMS PIER Manual published two sample policies. One policy was from the Sedgwick County (KS) EMS Department (Appendix B) and the second was from The Newport News Fire Department (Appendix C). Both of these policies were simple and straightforward making them adaptable to the needs of the Elgin Fire Department. A sample policy was also procured from the Phoenix Fire Department.

The idea of media worksheets was presented in two different articles. Ken Hines (April 1994) advocates the regular use of these worksheets when dealing with the media. He states “Every journalist will follow the basic five “Ws” and “H” method of gathering facts. The who, what, where, when, why

and how” (pg. 32). The questions can be anticipated by formulating a worksheet that would be consistently used in most situations. Wayne Mailliard of the Hollywood Florida Fire Department also is a proponent of media worksheets. In his applied research paper (1995) he presents a sample worksheet (Appendix D) that he developed for his own department. This worksheet follows the advice of Hines in addressing the five “Ws” and “H” question methodology.

PROCEDURES

Research for this paper began in June 1997 with a literature review at the Learning Resource Center (“LRC”) at the National Emergency Training Center (“NETC”) in Emmitsburg, Maryland. In additional literature review was done at the Gail Borden Public Library in Elgin, Illinois in September 1997. Several trade magazine articles and books were found related to the subject matter under the catalog title of “media relations”.

Interviews were conducted with a lawyer, a media consultant and several fire department public relations personnel.

Attorney Lawrence Hogan, co-author of the book, “Legal Aspects of the Fire Service”, was interviewed on June 11, 1997 regarding the issues of Freedom of the Press, Freedom of Information and Privacy Rights as it relates to the fire departments and the media.

Robert Doran, media consultant was interviewed on July 30, 1997 after he presented a workshop to the Elgin Police Department on freedom of information issues. The legal aspects of confidentiality and the public’s right-to-know were discussed. He also advised me of a further resource

on written media relations policies for fire departments by referring me to his brother Captain Roger Doran of the Skokie, Illinois Fire Department.

Battalion Chief Kevin McGee, from the Prince William County Department of Fire and Rescue was interviewed by telephone on October 27, 1997 regarding his department's written media policy and media relations program. Christina Kelly of the Phoenix Fire Department's Media Relations Division was interviewed on October 24, 1997 regarding their department's media policy and media education program. Captain Roger Doran of the Skokie Fire Department was interviewed October 21, 1997. Media policies and use of media worksheets was discussed.

Written policies and media worksheets were requested from several fire departments. Those received and applicable to the Elgin Fire Department are located in the indicated appendices.

These interviews, literature reviews and model policies form the basis for development of this research.

Limitations

This research was limited by the relative lack of written and comprehensive media policies available through the literature reviews and personal contacts with fire departments. This limitation could be diminished by use of internet capabilities in the future. Inquiries through this medium would likely result in considerably more responses to a request for written policies, procedures and worksheets.

Definitions

EXECUTIVE STAFF OFFICER. This term refers to the rank of Deputy Fire Chief, Division Chiefs and higher rank on the Elgin Fire Department.

PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER. This term refers to fire department personnel assigned to interact with the media.

STAFF OFFICER. This refers to the rank of Captain and above on the Elgin Fire Department. This would include Captains, Deputy Chiefs, Training Officers, Fire Chief and the Fire Marshall.

RESULTS

1. What components are needed for the development of a comprehensive media relations program?

A review of the available literature and interviews with fire department Public Relations Officers, a media consultant and an attorney revealed some common components believed to be necessary for a successful media relations programs. These components include communication skills training, applicable legal training, education of the media regarding fire department operations, and some form of written policy or worksheet to be used as a guideline for fire department personnel.

Among the most commonly cited components was the need for good communication skills by whomever was to address the media. Several articles discussed this need by focusing on responses to anticipated media inquiries. Articles titled, "Nine Types of Media Questions: and How to Respond to Them" (Blundell 1995), "Dealing with the Media: Tips From A Pro Who Has Worked Both Sides of the Fire Line" (Hines 1994) and "The Care and Feeding of the Media Monster: (Kane 1996) are

examples of the literature written to coach and advise fire personnel on how to safely respond to reporters without being manipulated into giving inappropriate information. These articles not only focus on traditional communication skills like being clear, concise and articulate but they also stress the content of replies. Specifically, they concentrate on being informative and portraying a positive image while not becoming vulnerable legally or ethically.

Another related component that was repeatedly identified during the research was a working legal knowledge of the concepts of "Freedom of Information", "Right to Privacy", and "Freedom of the Press". Knowing legal limitations is commonly recognized as necessary regarding information releases. What information to give or not to give and the limitations of media access to the emergency scene were addressed by Attorneys Hogan and Hogan as well as other authors and experts interviewed.

Media education about fire department operations was found to be a component advocated by many of the researched sources. The Phoenix Fire Department has been a forerunner in this area with the establishment of a five day "Media Academy." This academy certifies media personnel not only in the subject of fire department operations but also in personal safety considerations. Other departments also report great value in having a media education program. Prince William County (Va.) Fire and Rescue reports that they have monthly luncheons with the area media and other county departments not only as a means to air out potential problems but also as an educational information exchange. This type of gathering also allows for clarification of expectations by both parties. In an article by Bob Riha, "Media Relations: Guidelines for Public Safety Personnel (1996). The formation of a joint media and fire department committee is advocated for involvement in media policy development. Bob Riha quotes from The Standard Manual of the Law Enforcement Agency Accreditation Program (Chapter 54: Public Information, April 1994): "By allowing media representatives to participate in the process of

developing policies and procedures relating to the public information function, agencies can receive input that should lead to more effective working relationships between agency and media personnel.”

The use of written guidelines and or worksheets is also a component that supports good media relations. Though only a few written policies were found notably, the Newport News Fire Department, Sedgwick County EMS, Prince William County Fire and Rescue (Appendix E) and the Phoenix Fire Department (Appendix F). Many departments had media worksheets. The worksheets not only help the PIO or Incident Commander organize information to present to the media, they also provide a guideline for what information will be given and by its omission on the form, what information will not be given. Worksheets from the Hollywood (Florida) Fire Department and Prince William County Fire and Rescue (Appendix G). are similar in content with format variation the only difference. Ken Hines in his article, "Offensive and Defensive media tactics (1995) presents a generic type of media worksheet (Appendix H). He supports their use saying, "A media worksheet can be a useful aid, especially if the designated information officer does not have a great deal of experience dealing with the press" (pg 72).

Unexpected Results

During this research the question of "Who should speak to the media?" surfaced on occasion. The answers given during interviews with fire department public relations personnel varied. For some departments there is a permanently assigned Public Relations Officer (PIO) who serves as the main contact for the media for most incidents. For other departments, the Incident Commander or his designee (the incident's assigned PIO) is the spokesperson for the incident. On EMS incidents, some departments use the lead paramedic as the spokesperson. It appears that there is a wide range of responses to this question.

The unexpected finding on this matter came from the Phoenix Fire Department. Ms. Christina Kelly of their public relations department (Phone interview 10-28-97) reported that all firefighters regardless of rank or seniority were encouraged to interact with the media if so approached. Each firefighter is given a "media card" to use as a guideline when speaking with the media (Appendix I). Firefighters also receive training in media relations during their recruit school. This approach places the responsibility for giving accurate and appropriate information to the media on all personnel. It also gives them the shared responsibility of portraying a positive image to the public. This approach requires training in media relations at all levels and it requires trust in your personnel.

What written policies or procedures are available for use as "models" for use by Fire Departments?

There were a few written policies found that could serve as examples for development of a policy for the Elgin Fire Department. The PIER manual offered two sample policies one from an Emergency Medical Services provider, the Sedgwick County EMS and one from a career fire department the Newport News Fire Department. The Prince William County Fire and Rescue Service offered a county wide policy that includes the fire department and the Phoenix Fire Department had a detailed written standard operating procedure consistent with the Incident Management System. For the most part departments contacted did not have a formal written policy or their policies did not provide a guideline for media interaction.

Some written guidelines were found in the form of media information sheets. The Hollywood Fire Department is an example of this type of written format and as mentioned previously, Ken Hines (1995) developed a generic type of media worksheet that was a composite of several fire departments

(Appendix H). These worksheets gave the user a basis for information to be given. If information was not on the worksheet this often indicated that it was not to be given out.

What identified component of a comprehensive media relation program are adaptable to the Elgin Fire Department?

Given the background and history of the Elgin Fire Department, many of the identified components can be used in some form in the development of our media relations program. The specific areas of media communications skills training of personnel, development of written guidelines, and education of the media are all adaptable in modified forms.

In recent years, the Elgin Fire Department's Staff has had exposure to workshops and training regarding media communications. In most cases the fire department's executive staff has served as the primary contact to the area media regarding emergency incidents. On occasion, company officers and paramedics have interacted with the media usually at the direction of executive staff officers. Expansion of media training to include communication skills and legal limitations can be developed to include all personnel. The intent is to have everyone understand the process even though they may not be assigned to act as the media contact. This training could be done in house through the training department or through an outside consultant.

Presently, a written policy and media sheet is available in our department's policy manual. The present policy is brief and does not offer any specific guidelines, the media sheet could also be expanded to include more detail. Using the policies and media sheets found during this research as models, both of these items can be further developed by the department staff.

The concept of educating the media would be a new endeavor for the Elgin Fire Department. Due to time and budget constraints a limited program could be developed. The Phoenix program would not be feasible, however, for the Elgin Fire Department due to cost and time constraints. A one day workshop or symposium could accomplish any of the same objectives. The goal would be an improved relationship based on mutually agreed expectations with the media and an understanding of the fire department emergency operations. This could result in more accurate reporting, improved media safety on emergency scene and a more accurate and positive public image for the fire department.

DISCUSSION

During the literature review at the Learning Resource Center at the NETC, it became evident that a majority of the articles written on “media relations” were concerned with how to respond to the media. Their appeared to be a great deal of mistrust of the press. Fears of being misquoted, misrepresented or legally liable dominate the articles written. The media is often seen as an opposing force with a differing agenda in conflict with that of a fire service. The intensity of these feelings and perceptions puts those assigned as Public Information Officers into a defensive position. That has little benefit for all those involved.

Fortunately not all articles and interviews supported this dark perception. A more hopeful attitude was expressed by some. From these sources, ideas like media education and the formation of joint committees of media and fire personnel emerged. Cooperative ventures between the two organizations was seen as helpful, positive and achievable.

Historically, the media in the Elgin area have been positive toward the fire department, however there have been problems. Inaccuracies and misrepresentations have occurred. At times these have generated ill feelings and mistrust from fire department staff. Personal agendas by the media and the need for an interesting story still have the potential to obscure the facts of the situation. Often times it seems that a little media education could go a long way in explaining our actions on the emergency scene. Good communications could also eliminate misunderstandings that have occurred regarding the internal non-emergency operations within our department. Establishing personal relationships with the media can help eliminate impersonal judgments on each others motives and it avails itself to conflict resolution.

Media education as presented by the Phoenix Fire Department's Media Academy is impressive. However, for small non-urban departments it's not practical from a cost effective viewpoint. The time, personnel and costs are prohibitive for most departments. The Phoenix programs goals of providing the media with an orientation to local fire department operations has merit as does the need to educate them on personal safety at the emergency scene. These objectives can be pursued by local departments using other more limited forums such as seminars, tours and symposiums. The end result is to educate the media using whatever means are available locally.

Internal training of all fire personnel on media communications though important, will likely meet resistance. Distrust of the media along with a discomfort of public speaking will make it difficult for some personnel to find this training applicable. Not everyone is qualified or desirous of being a PIO. This training needs to be presented as an overview and not a job assignment. Again, looking at Phoenix's media relations policy, everyone is encouraged to speak with the media but it's not mandatory and many departments differ on their view of who speaks to the media. Training everyone in

department policies and guidelines can do no harm and it will promote a better understanding of overall department operations. Also suggested is the development of a training unit devoted to media relations that can be included in the recruit training academy. Early exposure to possible media situations would be good preparatory training.

The development of written policies is not a one person job. It requires input from various sources to be effective. Among those who must be considered are the fire chief and associated staff, media representatives or consultants and the legal department for the jurisdiction involved. A sound policy will withstand legal challenges while satisfying media needs and providing a guideline for fire officials. A task force or committee could be a possible means of accomplishing this goal. By whatever means used to develop these policies the written format will need legal review prior to implementing. Further development of a media worksheet can streamline the contents of the policy and can be a user friendly tool. The policies and worksheets collected represent a diverse cross section of fire departments. A thorough review of each by Elgin Fire Department Staff can assist in the development of our own unique policy.

Safeguarding the fire department while improving media relations can be accomplished through the establishment of written policies, media education and departmental training as suggested by the results.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the research findings, related interviews and the background of the Elgin Fire Department the following recommendations are made.

It is recommended that the Elgin Fire Department develop a comprehensive media information policy and media worksheet to be used as a guideline by all personnel. This policy should be developed by the department's executive staff and reviewed by the city's legal department prior to full implementation. The use of sample policies as supplied in this research can form the framework for a more customized policy for the Elgin Fire Department. The legal review will insure that the issues of Privacy Rights and Freedom of Information are addressed. This written guideline will also provide for consistency in the release of media information and it will clarify as to what personnel will be designated to interact with the media.

Training of all personnel in communication skills with the media is also recommended. This training should incorporate use of the written policy as well as specific training in response to media questioning. The use of an outside consultant for this training would be optimal. A qualified "media expert" would be able to give the benefit of their experience as a training tool. Presently, there are no such individuals among our personnel. The suggestion that all personnel be trained even though they may not be a designated Public Information Officer, this would be of value in understanding the organization's goals and philosophy. It would also be preparatory training for future Staff and Executive Staff Officers.

The final recommendation is for some type of training to be established for the media regarding fire department operations and policies. This training would focus on developing a mutual understanding of each others' expectations and limitations. It would also insure more accurate reporting and would

most likely improve the fire department's public image. The vehicle for this training could be an annual or semi annual breakfast meeting where local media and selected fire department personnel would meet to discuss their concerns as well as providing the media with a tour of equipment and facilities and an explanation emergency operations. Part of this training would include safety issues regarding the media's protection on the scene. An annual meeting is suggested as a minimum in order to train new media personnel that may have been hired or assigned to cover fire department events. It will also give veteran media personnel an opportunity to bring up any new concerns. The annual breakfast would by no means be the only available opportunity for emerging issues to be addressed. Hopefully, the spirit of cooperation that this forum provides will be carried over throughout the year.

These recommendations are made in an effort to improve media relations and to provide our personnel with some security in the form of a guideline when dealing with the media. On the Elgin Fire Department, policy development and training remains a team effort amongst staff members. Additional ideas and concerns would likely be generated regarding the actual implementation of a written policy and training for personnel and media.

It is recommended that an evaluation of the implemented policy and program be done after its first year of operation.

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